

THE THIRST by Jo Nesbo
Published by Harvill Secker

Jo Nesbo is one of my favourite authors. Apart from his children's novels, I have read all his books, including the complete Harry Hole series – of which *The Thirst* is his latest. They never disappoint, and each one is action-packed from start to finish. True to the Nordic Noir genre, anything can happen and even the hero is not safe from harm. It was therefore an easy choice for this month's book review.

THE PLOT

After his last case put those closest to him in danger, Harry Hole has left the Oslo police force and is now a lecturer at Police College. One of his students is Oleg, his stepson. A recovering alcoholic, Harry is trying to be a more hands-on husband and father, but the lure of crime solving is just as hard a habit to break as alcohol.

When a serial killer starts murdering women he meets on the Internet dating site, *Tinder*, the Chief of Police knows there is only one man who can solve the case. Unfortunately, Harry has promised his new wife, Rakel, not to get involved with detective work again and he is reluctant to accept the job. However, he changes his mind after discovering there is something about the murderer the current investigators have missed. Realising the killer is possibly the monster he failed to catch previously, Harry's instincts kick in and he throws himself into the hunt for the only killer to have eluded him.

MY REVIEW

Jo Nesbo is Norway's answer to Stig Larsson. His novels are fast-paced and exciting, and do not hold back in terms of bloody violence and body count. In this novel, however, the blood takes centre stage, as the serial killer literally has a thirst for blood. After biting his female victim's carotid artery, wearing a set of metal false teeth, he then lets her bleed to death before gaining sexual gratification post-mortem. Nice guy.

Nesbo's seasoned detective, Harry Hole, is a great protagonist. Unorthodox in his approach – and definitely not perfect – Harry is a complex character. Although a recovering alcoholic – following a long-term relationship with his favourite tippie, *Jim Beam* bourbon – he nevertheless still retains a sharp and dogged determination to root out murderers and corrupt officials alike, bringing them to justice at all costs... even if it jeopardises his family and career.

Harry is the archetypal dog with a bone. Unable to let go of a case, he will pursue it to the bitter end. This approach has gained him admirers over the years, particularly among his colleagues. However, it has equally led to a few run-ins with authority – not least with Mikael Bellman, the Chief of Police – although Harry has never let that bother him.

Harry has been dating Rakel Fauke on and off for several years. They are now married and have settled down as a family with Rakel's son Oleg. Because his last case put their lives in danger, Harry promised Rakel he would resign from active service. As a result, he now teaches new recruits at Police College. It is a role he enjoys, and he is a good teacher, but Mikael Bellman has other ideas for him.

The latest murder case – the killer dubbed a ‘vampire’ by the popular press and a ‘vampirist’ by more academic minds – is proving difficult and he believes Harry is the only man who can solve it. However, Bellman also has an ulterior motive. He wants to make sure the department looks good by bringing the killer to justice, in order to help further his own political ambitions.

To make sure Harry complies, Bellman tries to blackmail him into accepting the job by threatening to reveal Oleg's past drug habit. Harry therefore finds himself torn between keeping his promise to Rakel and satisfying his overwhelming urge to get involved in the hunt – especially when he discovers the investigating officers have probably missed something... the fact that the killer is very likely the same criminal Harry failed to apprehend for earlier crimes. Needless to say, Harry cannot resist the challenge. Luckily, Rakel understands her man all too well and is not surprised when he accepts the job.

It would take too long to describe all the twists and turns in the story, not to mention spoiling the intrigue. Suffice it to say, there are many lines of enquiry to follow... and Harry eventually follows them all. He is nothing if not thorough.

As with his previous novels, Nesbo introduces several different characters along the way – some old and some new. This can sometimes be confusing, given the unfamiliarity and similarity of the Norwegian names, and it is easy to get them mixed up. However, these are minor quibbles when set against the gripping storyline and wealth of intriguing characters and plot twists, which arrive thick and fast.

The Thirst is definitely a novel worth reading, and if you have never read any of Jo Nesbo's Harry Hole novels, I guarantee it will immediately make you want to read its predecessors. They are completely addictive.

THE AUTHOR

Jo Nesbo played football for Norway's premier league team Molde, but his dream of playing professionally for Spurs was dashed when he tore ligaments in his knee at the age of eighteen. After three years military service he attended business school and formed the band Di derre ('Them There'). Their second album topped the charts in Norway, but he continued working as a financial analyst, crunching numbers during the day and gigging at night. When commissioned by a publisher to write a memoir about life on the road with his band, he instead came up with the plot for his first Harry Hole crime novel, *The Bat*. He is regarded as one of the world's leading crime writers, with *The Leopard*, *Phantom*, *Police* and *The Son* all topping the UK bestseller charts, and his novels are published in 50 languages.

'The Thirst' is published by Harvill Secker and is available in eBook and paperback

format. It can be purchased from Amazon, Waterstones, W H Smith and other leading bookshops.